

(12) UK Patent Application (19) GB (11) 2 351 030 (13) A

(43) Date of A Publication 20.12.2000

(21) Application No 9914284.6

(22) Date of Filing 19.06.1999

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(51) INT CL⁷
A63F 3/02

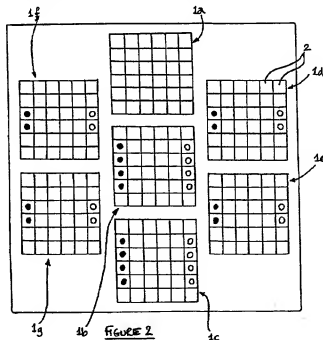
(52) UK CL (Edition R)
A6H HGC HJB

(56) Documents Cited
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(58) Field of Search
UK CL (Edition R) A6H HGA HGC HGE HHX HJB
INT CL⁷ A63F 3/00 3/02
Online: WPI, EPDOC, JAPIO

(54) Abstract Title
A board game

(57) A board game apparatus comprises one or more boards with game playing grids 1a-g marked thereon and a set of game playing pieces for each player wherein each piece (fig.3) has a number of faces and where two or more of the faces are differentiated (5a, 5b) to correspond to different characteristics of the playing piece. The rules for playing the game may provide an evolution of the characteristics of each piece, which define the limits of movement for that piece on and between each grid. Optionally, the playing pieces may be cubic with up to six different characters used to distinguish each face. The characters can take the form of runes which may then be used for divination. Preferably the grids of the apparatus represent a hierarchy of realms based on Norse mythology, the aim of the game being to progress a set number of pieces from the grid representing the underworld to the grid representing the realm of the gods.



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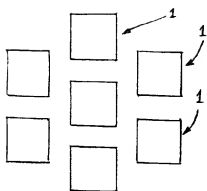


FIGURE 1A

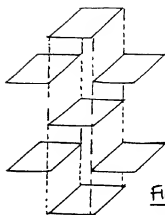


FIGURE 1B

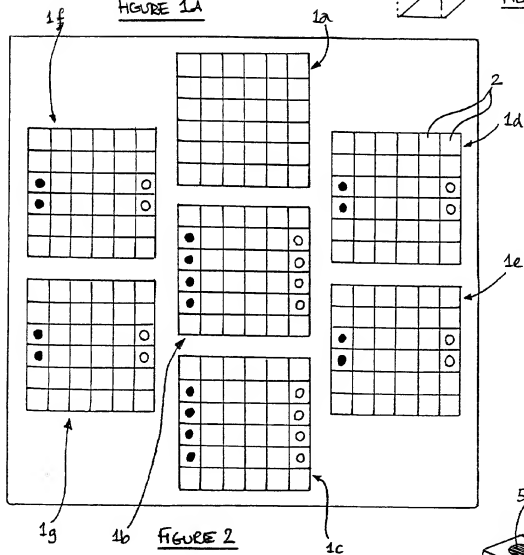


FIGURE 2

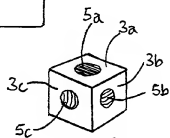


FIGURE 3

BOARD GAME**Field of the Invention**

5 The present invention relates to a novel board game apparatus for playing a strategy board game. The board game apparatus may be a boxed set of one or more boards and playing pieces or may be comprised in computer software and hardware.

Background to the Invention

10 Inspiration for the present invention comes from a deep rooted interest in Norse and similar mythologies and brings aspects of chess, and in particular 3-dimensional chess, into a more dynamic rôle playing environment.

 In common with 3-dimensional chess, the present invention comprises a plurality of game playing grids on which playing pieces are moved at the player's
15 choice but restricted within certain degrees of freedom determined by the identity of the playing piece. As game play progresses the playing pieces move or graduate from one game playing grid to another and tactical advantages are obtained over the opponent against whom the game is played by capture or blocking of the opponent's playing pieces. The sequence of game play suitably alternates between
20 players as with chess and the degrees of freedom of movement of individual playing pieces may be the same as or similar to the degrees of freedom of movement to other playing pieces in chess. Here, however, the similarity ends and the game of the present invention adopts a unique identity all of its own.

 The key differentiating feature of the game of the present invention is the
25 theme of progression or evolution of each of the playing pieces throughout the course of the game and in accordance with the preferred theme of the game this is

based around certain aspects of Norse mythology. Instead, for example, of an individual playing piece starting out as a pawn and remaining a pawn throughout the course of the game it transforms from one identity to another and ascends from one level of game play demarcated by a given grid to the next level. In the context of
5 Norse mythology, the ascension from one level to another represents ascension from the one or more natural worlds to the world of the gods and with the lowliest of beings starting out from the underworld before reaching the natural world(s). Furthermore, each playing piece changes and preferably evolves in social status, power or abilities as game play progresses as an integral part of the process of
10 ascension between the different worlds or realms.

Summary of the Invention

According to the first aspect of the present invention there is provided a board game apparatus which comprises:

One or more boards (i.e. playing surface(s)) and game playing grids marked
15 out on the board or boards, each respective game playing grid being identifiable so that game play may generally progress in a sequence between game playing grids;

a respective set of game playing pieces for each player, each playing piece having a number of faces, wherein two or more of the faces correspond to different characters of the playing piece;

20 and rules dictating game play in which each of the playing pieces has a respective degree of freedom of movement around the grid(s) and/or between the grid(s) for each one of the different faces of the playing piece corresponding to a different character, the rules further dictating that the face determining the game playing character of the playing piece changes during progression of the game.

In a preferred embodiment of the game, the rules dictate that the change in character of the playing piece is a progressive evolution from a character in which the playing piece has limited freedom of movement (which may correspond to a low status character such as a slave or thrall) to a state in which the playing piece has a relatively greater freedom of movement which may correspond to a high status character such as a magician or king, most notably comprising the freedom to move from one game playing grid/level to another. Such progressive evolution may, however, be cyclical. In one preferred embodiment of the invention the change of the playing piece character takes place with each playing turn of the player.

In common with chess, the turn of each player is suitably alternated whereby each player alternately has the opportunity to advance a selected one of their playing pieces within its respective degree of freedom of movement.

A particularly preferred form of each playing piece is the form a cube, whereby the playing piece may have up to six different characters, one character corresponding to each of the different faces. In the preferred embodiment of the invention, however, one of the six faces of the cube playing piece is marked to give a unique identity to that particular playing piece in contrast to the other playing pieces. In the embodiment of the invention that is based upon Norse mythology, the unique identity of each playing piece is suitably ascribed by marking the playing piece with a distinctive rune symbol.

Preferably, the rules dictate that the game playing grids represent respective worlds or realms between which one or more specified character(s) of game playing piece may move. These worlds or realms are suitably arranged in a hierarchy. Suitably the game playing grid that corresponds to the lowermost in the hierarchy is

representative of the underworld and the highest in the hierarchy is representative of the realm of the gods.

In a particularly preferred embodiment of the present invention the game playing pieces are moved in accordance with the rules to ascent up the hierarchy of game playing grids but if captured by an opponent's playing piece are demoted to the lower most game playing grid in the hierarchy.

Brief Description of Drawings

A preferred embodiment of the present invention will now be more particularly described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings wherein:

Figures 1 and 1A are schematic diagrams of suggested options for configuring game playing grids of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a plan view of a game playing board comprising seven game playing grids arranged in the same plane adjacent to each other and with starting positions for the respective playing pieces denoted by circular markings on the respective grids;

Figure 3 is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of playing piece comprising a cube and showing three faces of the cube each marked with a different character of the playing piece.

Description of the Preferred Embodiment

The apparatus of the preferred embodiment of the present invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings comprises a set of cuboid game playing pieces and a set of seven game playing grids 1, each grid 1 being a 6 by 6 square grid with each cell 2 of the grid 1 constituting a position which a respective playing piece may occupy at a given time. In this respect, each game playing grid 1 is

similar to the grid of a chess board. It will be noted, however, that each grid has a substantially lesser number of grid squares than a conventional chess board. Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 2, starting positions 3 for the respective playing pieces are suitably marked on respective ones of the grids 1.

5 In Figure 2 each of the grids is labelled respectively 1a-g. The respective grids 1a-g each have their own identity corresponding to a different realm in Norse mythology. The three game playing grids 1a,bc positioned as a central column in the array of grids 1 respectively represent the realm of the gods, Asgard, the realm of mankind, Midgard, and the underworld, Helheim. The game player may readily
10 distinguish between these and identify the respective game playing grid 1 either by a colour code or other suitable marking on each respective grid that makes clear its identity. Alternatively, the grid's identity may be clearly denoted by the fixed positioning of each respective grid relative to each other on a common substrate or support structure which may suitably comprise a wooden board on which the game
15 playing grids 1a-g are each marked and with the orientation of the board clearly indicated on the board.

The four game playing grids 1d, 1e, 1f and 1g represent in Norse mythology the realm of ice, Niflheim, the realm of the giants Jotunheim, the realm of fire Muspelheim and the realm of the fertility gods, Vanaheim.

20 Referring briefly to Figures 1A and 1B, preferred alternative configurations of the seven game playing grids 1a-g are either in the broadly "concentric" array in the same plane on a common support surface/board; or are in a tiered 3-dimensional configuration as illustrated in Figure 1B with the grids 1a-g linked together by a supportive framework.

In common with chess, the game playing pieces for the game are constrained to move within specified freedoms of movement between the respective cells of each game playing grid. Unlike chess pieces, however, the game playing pieces of the present invention are multifaceted and evolve during game play.

- 5 One example game playing piece is illustrated in Figure 3 and comprises a cube that is marked on five surfaces 3a-e with respective differently coloured spots 5a-e and on the sixth surface with a rune symbol (not shown). The rune symbol identifies the particular playing piece but the character and associated degree of freedom of movement of the playing piece is determined by which face 3a-e of the
- 10 cube is uppermost in a given game playing turn. Within the Norse mythology theme, the five differently coloured marked faces 3a-e suitably respectively represented a Thrall, a Freeman, a Warrior, a Priest and a Magician. These may be denoted, for example, by the respective colours black, green, red, white and purple.

- 15 Each of the five character identities corresponding to the faces 3a-e has its respective distinctive freedom of movement. The Thrall 3a is the least evolved character of the playing pieces and the rules suitably dictate that it may only move one space in any direction on a given game playing grid 1. By analogy with chess, its moves are akin to that of a pawn. As with a chess pawn, it can capture an opposing piece that occupies the grid square to which it moves.

- 20 The Freeman playing piece character has a freedom of movement akin to a chess bishop playing piece. It too can capture an opponent's playing piece when landing upon the grid cell of the opponent's playing piece. It is, however, constrained not to be able to capture an opponent's Magician character playing piece.

The warrior character playing piece has a freedom of movement akin to a chess rook, moving any number of spaces vertically or horizontally and like the Freeman can capture any opposing piece in a grid square upon which it lands but cannot capture a Magician.

- 5 The fourth playing piece character, the Priest, has the freedom to move to any unoccupied square within the game playing grid. It cannot, however, capture.

- The fifth and most powerful of the game playing piece characters is the Magician whose freedom of movement is from a square in one world to a square in the same position in another world/realm – i.e. from one game playing grid 1a-f to another. The Magician character captures an opponent's playing piece if the square
10 that it moves to is occupied by an opposing piece. It can capture any character of opponent playing piece but can only itself be captured by a Thrall. The general ability to move from any world/realm to any other is limited only in that the Magician in the lowermost world, Helheim, can only move (reincarnate) to the square of the
15 same position in Midgard, the central (natural) world.

- The rules of game play dictate that each player takes a turn to move any one of his sixteen playing pieces within the freedom of movement of that playing piece's currently uppermost face 3a-e/character. With each game playing turn, however, the uppermost face is progressed to the next in the evolutionary sequence of
20 faces/characters. Accordingly, a playing piece that begins the game as a Thrall will at the end of the first playing turn evolve into a Freeman and at the end of its second playing turn will evolve into a Warrior and so on until it becomes a Magician at which point at its next game playing turn it will revert to being a Thrall. When the playing piece reaches the point of conversion from being a Magician to being a
25 Thrall, it will have by then moved as a Magician from one world to another.

The general objective of the game is to progress all playing pieces from their starting status through their various incarnations respectively from the realm in which they begin life through to the highermost realm, the realm of the gods, Asgard represented by the uppermost grid 1a which may suitably be coloured in gold in contrast to, for example, the underworld, Helheim, which may be coloured grey.

In a preferred embodiment of the game, all playing pieces begin as Thralls and whenever a player captures an opponent's playing piece, the captured piece is returned to the opponent as a Thrall in the lowermost realm/game playing grid 1c, Helheim. The opponent is suitably restricted from playing that reincarnated playing piece until the next subsequent game playing turn.

The significance of the four intermediate realms denoted by game playing grids 1d-g will now be addressed. Although, as described above, the Magician is generally the only character of each playing piece which can move between the worlds/realms, a limited ability to do this is also conferred upon each of the other four characters when they are within a world/realm that is ascribed to their character. Niflheim, the realm of ice, corresponding to grid 1d is suitably ascribed to Priests, Jotunheim, the realm of giants, grid 1e, is suitably ascribed to Thralls, Muspelheim, the realm of fire, is suitably ascribed to Warriors and Vanaheim, the realm of fertility gods, is suitably ascribed to Freemen. When a playing piece evolves into a Priest on Niflheim, grid 1d, it is then empowered with the ability to move to either Midgard, grid 1b or Asgard, grid 1a. Unlike the Magician who can capture when moving between the worlds, the other playing piece characters when travelling to or from their associated realm can only move to unoccupied squares.

The limited freedom of movement to travel between worlds/realms applies in either direction and, accordingly, a Priest character in Asgard or Midgard can travel back to his associated realm of Niflheim, if desired.

As noted above, the overall objective is to be the player to first progress all of their playing pieces to Asgard. This may, of course, be varied by specifying, for example, a lower minimum number of pieces reaching Asgard or by specifying a greater number of pieces in Asgard than the opponent by an agreed difference or the player having the greatest number of pieces there after an agreed length of time. Other variations of the game may, for example, include imposition of a handicap on the more experienced player.

Two further specific rules that may usefully be employed in the preferred embodiment of the game involve the two realms of Muspelheim, fire, and Niflheim, ice. If a player in the Muspelheim realm moves their playing piece so that it becomes a Warrior on this game playing grid 1g, then the opponent if he has a piece on the same square in Midgard will be obliged to move it on his game playing turn. The opponent will not be able to move onto that square until the Warrior on the Muspelheim grid 1g is moved or captured.

As for the ice realm, Niflheim, the player who moves so that his playing piece assumes the character of the Priest while on the Niflheim realm, playing grid 1c, this will freeze any opponent's playing piece on the equivalent square in the Midgard realm, playing grid 1b. If the equivalent square is unoccupied, then the opponent may move to that square but will be unable to leave until the Priest on the Niflheim playing grid 1c has been moved or captured.

The rune symbols on the playing pieces do not necessarily have a direct rôle in the game. However, one of the uses of runes is in divination, and it is possible to

use the sets of runes in the game for this purpose. This is done by holding the question you want answered in your mind, and pulling three runes from the bag. The first represents the past, the second represents what is happening in the present, and the third represents what should be the result if no action is taken

5 which will affect this.

Some features or aspects which are significant in the preferred embodiment of the game are:

1. The interconnection of the Norse themes. The board representing the different worlds on the world tree. The pieces being runestones, which can also be used for divination. The moves being based on the caste system. All this is described in Norse mythology.
2. The playing area having a main column of three grids. The highest grid where players aim to get their pieces, the lowest grid where captured pieces are replaced, and a central grid where pieces from the lowest grid must enter before entering any other worlds ensuring this grid is where much of the interaction between pieces occurs.
3. The moves of the thrall, freeman and warrior are similar, but not identical, to some of the moves in chess. The moves of the priest and king have not been used before and are necessary to the game play. The restrictions on which pieces may capture and what pieces they may capture are also unique and important.
4. The connection of four classes of piece to the outer worlds, giving them greater freedom within the associated grid, and in the case of the warrior and priest allowing them to affect the central grid.

25

CLAIMS

1. A board game apparatus which comprises:

one or more boards (i.e. playing surface(s) with game playing grids marked out on the board or boards, each respective game playing grid being identifiable so

5 that game play may generally progress in a sequence between game playing grids;

a respective set of game playing pieces for each player, each playing piece having a number of faces, wherein two or more of the faces are differentiated from each other to correspond to different characters of the playing piece;

and rules dictating game play in which each of the playing pieces has a
10 respective degree of freedom of movement around the grid(s) and/or between the grid(s) for each one of the different faces of the playing piece corresponding to a different character, the rules further dictating that the face determining the game playing character of the playing piece changes during progression of the game.

2. A board game apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the rules dictate that
15 the change in character of the playing piece is a progressive evolution from a character in which the playing piece has limited freedom of movement to a character in which the playing piece has a relatively greater freedom of movement, most notably comprising the freedom to move from one game playing grid/level to another.

20 3. A board game apparatus as claimed in claim 2 wherein the rules dictate that the change of the playing piece character takes place with each playing turn of the player.

4. A board game apparatus as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2 wherein, in common with chess, the turn of each player is alternated whereby each player

alternately has the opportunity to advance a selected one of their playing pieces within its respective degree of freedom of movement.

5 5. A board game apparatus as claimed in claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein each playing piece has the form of a cube, whereby the playing piece may have up to six different characters, one character corresponding to each of the different faces.

6. A board game apparatus as claimed in claims wherein one of the six faces of the cube playing piece is marked to give a unique identity to that particular playing piece in contrast to the other playing pieces.

7. A board game apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim wherein each
10 playing piece has a unique identity in contrast to the other playing pieces and the unique identity of each playing piece is ascribed by marking the playing piece with a distinctive rune symbol.

8. A board game apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the rules dictate that the game playing grids represent respective worlds or realms
15 between which one or more specified character(s) of game playing piece may move, these worlds or realms arranged in a hierarchy.

9. A board game as claimed in claim 8, wherein the game playing grid that corresponds to the lowermost in the hierarchy is representative of the underworld and the highest in the hierarchy is representative of the realm of the gods.

20 10. A game playing apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the game playing pieces are moved in accordance with the rules to ascend up the hierarchy of game playing grids but if captured by an opponent's playing piece are demoted to the lower most game playing grid in the hierarchy.

11. A game playing apparatus substantially as hereinbefore described with
25 reference to the accompanying drawings.



Application No: GB 9914284.6
Claims searched: 1-11

13

Examiner: Mark Sexton
Date of search: 6 October 2000

Patents Act 1977
Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.R): A6H (HGA, HGC, HGE, HHX, HJB)

Int Cl (Ed.7): A63F 3/00, 02

Other: Online: WPI, EPODOC, JAPIO

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
Y	GB 2311230 A (AHMED) - see whole document, note particularly figs 2-4 and p.3 lines 3-10	1
Y	US 4341386 (KLEVA) - see whole document, note particularly figs 1, 9 & 10	1
A	GB 2108396 A (WILDONE LTD.)	
A	GB 1490984 (TOY DEVELOPMENT LTD.)	

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
&	Member of the same patent family	E	Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.